HOLBROOK LIBRARY
No. 181
PACIFIC SCHOOL
OF RELIGION

# The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

*May 5th*, 1943

DEAR MEMBER,

Wide publicity has been given to a statement by the Bishop of Winchester, in which he calls attention to the growing callousness about the bombing of Germany and the tendency to gloat over the results. He suggests that we can all do something to discourage and discountenance this tendency, remembering what we owe to our intrepid airmen and at the same time that what is horrible and lamentable in Coventry and Southampton is also horrible and lamentable in Wilhelmshaven and Cologne.

Much more is involved in the issue raised by the Bishop than is generally recognized. While it has nothing to do directly with bombing, a recent brave act by Christians in Holland may put us on the right track for understanding what is at stake.

## A COURAGEOUS DUTCH PROTEST

The Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches in Holland not long ago addressed a joint letter to the German Commissioner, part of which is as follows :—

"The Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches of the Netherlands consider themselves compelled once again to approach you seriously. As we have told you previously, the sacred mission of the Churches compels them to raise their voice when principles based on the Gospel are being violated in public life. First and foremost we mention those principles which form the basis of the Christian life of our people, namely, justice, mercy and freedom of conscience. These principles bear witness that the authorities are bound by divine law and must refrain from actions condemned by this law.

"The Churches have already drawn attention to the increasing violation of justice in the following: the persecution of Jewish fellow citizens, even unto death; the enforcement of an outlook on the world and on life which is in notorious contradiction to Christ's gospel; the compulsion of labour service; National-Socialist education, in so far as it interferes with free teaching in Christian schools; enforced deportation of Dutch workers for labour in Germany; the execution of hostages; the arrest and permanent imprisonment of many."

In this letter a Nazi Government is reminded with great boldness that not only the Church, but the *authorities* are bound by a divine law, and that this law forbids to both Governments and individuals actions contrary to justice, mercy and freedom. It is just as much our concern as that of our Dutch friends whether there are laws of God which are binding on us even in war, both as individuals and as a nation.

There are those who believe that war itself is un-christian. This is not merely the view of Christian pacifists; the ordinary man quite outside the Churches has an instinctive feeling that war and Christianity are incompatible. He is quite right. The Oxford Conference on Church, Community and State in 1937, composed of official representatives of the Christian Churches (except the Roman Catholic) from all parts of the world, declared that the Christian condemnation of war is unqualified and unrestricted. War (it maintained) can occur only as the fruit and manifestation of sin.

But this still leaves unanswered the quite different question whether even within the *natural*, as yet un-christianized, order of nation and State, and of the relations between States, there may not exist distinctions of good and evil, of better and worse, which have a significance for God as well as for us; and the further question whether, if an order of law and justice and civil liberty, which has been built up by the labours and perseverance of many generations, is threatened with violence, it may not be the duty of Christians as responsible citizens of such a society to take up arms along with their fellow-citizens in its defence.

Participation in war as an obligation owed in given circumstances to God and man does not, however, absolve the Christian from daily obedience to the divine law nor relieve him from renewed moral choices. These increase in difficulty as war becomes total.

If we are to find our way, we must distinguish, so far as we can, methods of war which are the inevitable consequences of technical progress. As was pointed out in the last News-Letter, this is the first war which is being fought wholly as an industrial war.

From the military point of view there is no difference between an army and the Krupp and Skoda works. If it is in our power to destroy them, to refrain from doing so may mean the loss of thousands of lives of our own soldiers, the indefinite multiplication of the sufferings of our Russian allies, and perhaps the loss of the war itself with all its unimaginable consequences. Every machine, every part of an aeroplane or tank, every workshop that we can reach must be rendered useless. If the demolition of the adjacent houses of workers removes them to a greater distance, creates difficulties of transport, and thereby reduces the output of the factories, the houses too must be destroyed. If the destruction of the factory can be ensured only by enlargement of the target area, the area must be enlarged.

That is what war means. I have deliberately stated the military case in all its harshness. I can imagine myself becoming a pacifist if it has never seemed to me sense to embark on war and to hold back from dealing the hardest blows.

But where is all this going to lead us? The problem, so far as it concerns bombing, is well stated in an editorial note in a recent issue of *The Tablet*:—

> "At the beginning of the war the idea of military objectives was proclaimed in a much more definite and explicit fashion than now, when the tactics are to 'saturate the defences' by dropping

the greatest possible weight of bombs in the briefest time. The line between that and an indiscriminate generalizing of the target area becomes ever harder to maintain, and too much of the oratory of 'wings for victory' dwelt on a purely retributive notion of unloading a maximum weight of explosives on the German population."

Where the line is to be drawn between attacks on military targets, on the one hand, and indiscriminate slaughter and wanton destruction, on the other, is a decision which, so far as I can see, must be left to the Government, the military authorities, and the fighting men. It is a responsibility that they have to bear before God. The ordinary citizen has not the knowledge to assess military requirements. There are a host of technical questions in connection with bombing to which the civilian does not know the right answer.

This does not mean that the ordinary citizen has no responsibility. On the contrary, he has a very great responsibility. As the Bishop of Winchester says, we can all do something. We can each make our contribution to the growth of a temper and attitude which in countless indirect ways can influence public and military policy. In order to do this we need to be clear what are the essential Christian interests that are at stake.

## THE SACREDNESS OF HUMAN LIFE

To take life without cause is the greatest possible denial of the dignity and worth of man. Whether war is a sufficient cause is a matter for deep and anxious debate. But to take life *irresponsibly* is to strike at the foundations of any moral order or tolerable society.

There has always been a distinction between acts of war and murder. To kill in cold blood a defenceless prisoner is forbidden by international law. The recent execution by the Japanese of captured airmen has aroused feelings of the deepest horror. But our horror is morally justified only if we are fully determined ourselves to refrain from the wanton taking of life. If we accept the military consequences of the growth of an industrial society, we are bound at the same time to discover how to maintain under the new conditions the vital distinction between killing in battle and murder.

We have to make up our minds whether we condemn the Japanese action only because, in the language of the Prime Minister, it is "barbarous and unusual," or because it is a violation of the divine law, by the impartial operation of which we are ourselves equally judged. Neither the fact that war may be in some circumstances a hideous necessity nor the practical difficulty of making the distinction in border-land cases between acts of war and wanton killing must be allowed to blot out of our minds the truth that each individual life has worth in the eyes of God. If the life of a German child or defenceless prisoner is not sacred, no life is sacred. For the Christian to participate or acquiesce in the irresponsible taking of life is a blasphemous denial of the work of Christ.

There is no *fundamental* violation of Christian principle if, in an honest intention to attack a military target, the boundary line is on occasion over-stepped and the lives of non-combatants are needlessly sacrificed. We can make a large allowance also for exuberant language

provoked by Nazi atrocities; it is often a mere letting off of steam, not to be taken too seriously. But when there is a clamour in sections of the popular press for the systematic and ruthless destruction of German towns, or when in the speeches of public men devastation reaching beyond military targets, instead of being regretted, is applauded, the matter is serious. If this were to become the settled mood of the nation, we should have become quite incapable of creating a just and durable peace. To surrender to vindictiveness or to allow it to determine our national policy is to betray both our own cause and the cause of humanity.

## COMPASSION

There are occasions in war when it is the soldier's duty to overcome his pity for pity's own sake, since to yield to it at the moment would open the floodgates to greater suffering. But not even in war can we forget that pity is Godlike. Christ continually insisted that it is in the exercise of mercy that men most fully manifest their kinship with God. His own acts were prompted, as the Gospels repeatedly record, by the motive of compassion. Mercy, pity, compassion are the healing, humanizing forces in the relations of men. To let them die is like taking the humus out of the soil. We cannot allow ourselves to become consistently vindictive, cruel and callous and then change suddenly into something else.

The British, as has been shrewdly remarked, are not cruel, but may easily become callous. If British troops were ordered to commit some of the brutalities practised by the Nazis, they would become conscientious objectors in shoals. But while there is something peculiarly hellish in positive cruelty, the sufferings of the victims of callousness may not be appreciably less.

If the divine quality of compassion is allowed by the grace of God to burn in us as a flame, we shall by its light find the right answer to the torturing questions which meet us as Christians in the conduct of war. And if we preserve and nourish in the nation the spirit of mercy, it will be our greatest asset in the task of reconstruction, since pity and sympathy are the key to true understanding.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

**Subscriptions**—12s. 6d. ($3.00 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year. 6s. 6d. for six months (Great Britain and Ireland only). Single copies 6d. (up to No. 178, 4d.); reduction for quantities.

**Groups**—Special rates for Group Subscriptions can be had on application.

**Indices** have been issued every six months since October, 1939, price 1s. each, post free. Index to Nos. 157-178 now on sale.

*All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—*
THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 19 DEAN'S YARD, WESTMINSTER, LONDON, S.W. 1.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Christian Frontier Council, and printed in Great Britain by the Church Army Press, Cowley, Oxford.

HOLBROOK LIBRARY
PACIFIC SCHOOL
OF RELIGION

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER

*Supplement to* No. 181

MAY 5TH, 1943

# THE CHURCH IN EUROPE

A full understanding of what Christianity means for our times must grow out of the total experience of the whole body of Christians. A vital element in this total experience is what the Churches on the Continent of Europe have learned through trial and suffering.

We are always in danger of over-estimating the value of stimulating ideas and eloquent speech in comparison with what has been tested and proved in life. A square foot of soil that has been watered by the tears or blood of plain men and women may be more fruitful than many acres of speculative thinking or imposing schemes of reform.

Information about what is happening in the Churches on the Continent is scanty. Public acts and utterances are reflected week by week in *The Spiritual Issues of the War* and the *Catholic Bulletin of Foreign News* issued by the Ministry of Information. There is evidence that the fairness and sympathy of this presentation are appreciated by Christians on the Continent.

There are other channels of varied kinds by which information from time to time reaches this country. Much of this cannot be published, since it would cause embarrassment or danger to those to whom it relates. The Churches on the Continent are doing many things which they cannot tell to their Christian friends abroad, since this would make it no longer possible to do them.

From these various sources of information a picture emerges, the main outlines of which are sufficiently clear. The statements which follow are based on information from reliable sources. Readers must do their best to read between the lines and picture in their imagination the innumerable individual acts of courage and faithfulness which give living human content to cold and bare generalizations.

## SURVIVAL

The fact of outstanding importance is that, in spite of the violent hostility of the Nazi party, the Church in Germany and in the satellite and most of the occupied countries still survives as a corporate institution.

There are areas, it is true—such as Poland and Yugo-Slavia—in which every effort has been made to suppress the Church altogether. The vast majority of the clergy have been put to death, sent to concentration camps or deported. The work of the Church in many districts is brought to a standstill; only scattered, tiny groups of Christians are able to meet in secret.

But in Germany, Italy, Hungary, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Holland, Denmark and Norway the Church retains its corporate existence and congregations assemble regularly for public worship. In Hungary there appears to be little interference with the freedom of the Churches. In Germany active evangelism is possible in some parts of the country. In both large and small towns, in both rural areas and among industrial workers, audiences, sometimes very large audiences, come together to listen to the preaching of the Gospel.

The survival of the Churches as institutions keeps alive the possibility of action in many directions. The Churches are able to devise means of providing Christian instruction for adults and young people; to carry on, in however reduced a degree, the various ministries of the Church; to bring people together in groups for mutual encouragement and support; to create a Christian public opinion on moral issues, such as the question of euthanasia; and in quiet ways

behind the scenes to find opportunities of influencing public policy in a right direction. The ingenuity and resource by which means are found of carrying out these purposes, in face of obstacles of every kind, will provide material for a very interesting chapter in the history of the Church.

The survival of the Churches is at the same time a fact of the highest importance for the task of reconstruction in Europe, because they are almost the only institutions remaining in Europe which preserve a continuous link with Europe's past.[1] There is at least the possibility that they may become the chief rallying points in Europe for the conservation of the values that have given its character and strength to Western civilization.

The universal Church owes a lasting debt of gratitude to the courageous men and women, known and unknown, clerical and lay, who at the risk, and often at the price, of life and freedom, in face of dangers that were sometimes acute, have succeeded up to the present in saving from complete destruction the Christian Church in Europe.

## RESISTANCE

By the mere fact of continuing to exist the Churches have provided the most effective centre of resistance to the unlimited and absolute claims of the totalitarian State. It is not that they have engaged in political activities against the Government; from this they have on principle refrained. But the Nazi power has encountered here the uncompromising resistance of the human conscience, the decisive "I can do no other." There have been many thousands of clergy and laity who, rather than deny the faith, have been willing to sacrifice position, comfort, liberty and life itself.

The resistance has not been limited to the refusal of countless individuals to violate their conscience. The Churches have publicly borne witness to the truth in pronouncements, protests, pastoral letters and sermons.

What are the chief issues on which battle is joined and for which men are ready to suffer?

At the heart of the struggle is the claim that Christ is the only Head of the Church and that He is also the meaning and centre of human history. This is a claim which a totalitarian state cannot tolerate. Yet Christians can do no other than confess their faith, as the Churches on the Continent have done. But apart from public confession, the claim is made in the very existence of the Church. From one point of view the Church is encircled, hemmed in and suppressed by the public power of an anti-Christian state. Yet from another point of view the Church by its mere existence as a universal spiritual society encircles the state. It is something which the Nazis cannot get rid of; it perpetually confronts them as a spiritual allegiance which they cannot touch or destroy, and for this reason they fear it.[2]

From this arises the irreconcilable Christian opposition to the Nazi doctrine that the interests of the race or nation are decisive and final. The Church has on repeated occasions boldly maintained that "if the foundations of right are not based outside and above the individual or nation, or even outside and above all mankind, then the principles of right may change according to man's will, and the notion of right ceases to exist.[3] The Church in Europe stands forth to-day as the champion of an eternal and universal law of justice, which is the sole protection of the rights and liberty of the individual and the only foundation of a true and

[1] As was pointed out in an earlier supplement by Miss Barbara Ward (C.N-L. No. 144).

[2] A remarkable aid to an understanding of the inner meaning of the Church struggle in Germany has just appeared in the *Autobiography of a German Pastor* by Dr. Hans. P. Ehrenberg (S.C.M. Press, 6s.)—a most illuminating and stimulating book.

[3] The quotation, which is only one illustration out of many, is from the Pastoral Letter of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Berlin last Christmas.

enduring civilization. The pronounced stand and outspoken protests against anti-Semitism, notably in France and Holland, have been motivated not only by compassion, but by the conviction that to compromise with racialism is to deny the Christian faith.

Another major occasion of conflict in all countries under Nazi rule is the unlimited claims of the State to dispose of youth. In the Pastoral Letter read in Norwegian Churches in January of this year congregations were reminded that the law relating to a national youth service "violates the sacred authority of parents." "Homes are outraged" it is maintained, "when children are fetched by the police; while parents who obey God and their conscience by refusing to let their children be taken away are imprisoned."

It is a question of much interest what forces have enabled the Churches to survive in face of great dangers, and to offer a resistance which the authorities have not ventured wholly to crush? For one thing, in some countries, e.g. Belgium, Luxembourg, Holland and Norway, and in some parts of Germany, there has been a degree of popular support for the Church sufficient to make the authorities hesitate about proceeding to extreme lengths. It may be assumed also that the authorities are not wholly oblivious of the influence of religion as a stabilizing and socially integrating force. In Germany it would be foolish for them to overlook the power of Christianity to sustain important sections of the population in the trials through which they are passing, both on the battle field and on the home front.

Most important of all, perhaps, has been the help of those who hold positions of influence in the Government and in the army. Christianity has, after all, struck deep roots in the life of Germany. The number of convinced Christians, if small, is yet considerable and some of them occupy high positions; there are others in the higher ranks who, even if their personal belief is hesitating, regard the Christian tradition as a national asset. The action of such men, often at the risk of their position and personal safety, has at many critical points turned the scales. When the full story of such hidden but resolute interventions can be told, it will be of absorbing interest.

The situation recalls that of the Church in its early days in the Roman Empire, when it was befriended and helped by professed and secret believers in high places. Christians were found at the Court, in the army, among the aristocracy and the officials, and were able to exert their influence in protection of the Church. Even in the New Testament we read in one of St. Paul's letters of greetings from those "of Caesar's household," and the Christian adherents at Thessalonica included "of the chief women not a few."

## LIMITATIONS

But while the Church in Europe survives, it is condemned for the present to a maimed and crippled existence. Even where services are permitted they are often visited and spied on by the police. There is a great shortage of pastors and other Christian workers. There is a famine of Christian literature. Most serious of all have been the drastic restrictions on Christian influence on youth. In Germany, and some of the occupied countries, the Churches have been almost completely dispossessed from the field of education.

It is obvious that in the circumstances that have been described the Churches are largely debarred from exerting direct influence on public policy such as is possible for those who live under free institutions. What is surprising is how much has been actually accomplished in most difficult circumstances and at grave personal risk. The restrictions which limit present action have not led Christians on the Continent to turn aside from the sphere of public responsibility and to seek refuge in a purely inner sphere of religious life.

On the contrary, the evidence is that the conflicts of the present have given them a deeper and stronger sense of their responsibility to the nation as a whole and made them eager to take their part in the tasks of social and political reconstruction after the war.

We have not dwelt on the internal weaknesses of the Church which have manifested themselves. There have been failures and negligences in plenty. It is not for those who have not been exposed to the same severe tests to cast stones. It is rather for us to thank God for the great company who "in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in strife, in imprisonments" have proved themselves faithful servants of God.

## NEW BONDS

As might be expected, the common experience of trial and suffering has created new bonds. In spite of the animosities and bitternesses of the war the Protestant Churches of the different continental countries have been drawn closer together. Faced by the same dangers, they have arrived at a common understanding rooted in a common experience. Common concerns have also brought about, more particularly in Germany, in Holland and in France, a degree of collaboration between Protestants and Roman Catholics such as has not been known since the Reformation, and fresh attempts have been made by each to understand better the position of the other. Acts of courage, faithfulness and charity in one communion have won the admiration and gratitude of Christians belonging to the other.

There is also evidence that in the common struggle for human rights new contacts have been made between the Churches and the labour world. Breaches have been made in the walls of separation which have long existed between the Churches on the Continent and the workers. The possibilities for the future latent in such contacts do not need to be emphasized.

## DECISION

The most important part of the story cannot be told, not only because information is scanty and particularization would be inadvisable, but because in the main it is known only to God. It lies in the sphere of personal decision and of the hidden working of the Spirit of God in individual lives. Hosts of individuals, old and young, on the Continent of Europe have been compelled to a decision of a sharpness little known in the Anglo-Saxon world; a choice between the claims of Christ and the demands of the State, between loyalty to truth and right and a concentration camp. Boys and girls as they reach the threshold of manhood and womanhood find the choice awaiting them. We know that not a few have chosen Christ, to follow Him, if need be to death.

The forces of the spiritual world are beyond calculation. What harvest may grow from these secret acts of personal decision the future alone can show.

J. H. O.

*All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—*
THE CHRISTIAN NEW-LETTER, 19 DEAN'S YARD, WESTMINSTER, LONDON, S.W. 1.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Christian Frontier Council, and printed in Great Britain by the Church Army Press, Cowley, Oxford.